



# Improving Access to Inclusive Domestic Violence Services

Virginia Department of Social Services  
Office of Family Violence  
Learning Module 2

# Improving Access to Inclusive Domestic Violence Services

- This learning module will provide tools to:
  - improve access to services for LGBTQ individuals
  - make your program a more inclusive, welcoming environment for all clients.
- The first part of the module will cover some ways programs can do outreach to LGBTQ individuals within the community.
- The second part will cover ways programs can create a more inclusive environment for the LGBTQ survivors you serve.

# Improving Access to Inclusive Domestic Violence Services

- Improving access to services means that the needs of LGBTQ survivors, and the diversity among LGBTQ survivors, have been considered by the agency and that programming is inclusive and non-stigmatizing of LGBTQ communities.
- This is important because many LGBTQ victims still fear re-victimization from systems and institutions that have a history of exclusion, hostility and violence toward LGBTQ people.
- Historically, LGBTQ people were viewed as deviant or pathological by much of the health/ mental health communities.
- Further, LGBTQ individuals who are also African American, Latino, have a disability, are older, or in some other way marginalized, experience additional barriers, stigma and isolation.
- Much progress has been made; however, unfortunately, some providers still hold negative beliefs about LGBTQ people that have an impact in whether or not LGBTQ survivors access services.

***Access means:***

*To make contact with; be able to reach, approach, or enter;*

*To make accessible or available;*

*A way or means of approach or entry.*

# Improving Access to Inclusive Domestic Violence Services

There are many steps that can be taken to increase access to services and create a welcoming and inclusive environment . However, this is just a beginning. Your program will likely need to do explore additional steps that need to be taken for your program.



# Improving Access to Inclusive Services

*Every program comes to this work from a different starting point. The destination is the same place for each program, but it will be up to each program as to how they get there and what their process will look like.*

Program A has a  
nondiscrimination  
policy

Program B  
implemented a  
grievance process but  
done very little  
outreach.

Program C has done a  
lot of outreach with  
local LGBTQ groups,  
have out staff but do  
not have a grievance  
process.

**Access to  
inclusive  
services!**

# Community Outreach

Outreach to the LGBTQ community is a critical step in improving access in order to communicate that your program is inclusive. It also serves to build relationships and strengthen access to services both in your program and in other programs.

Outreach can be very different from one locality to another. For instance, there is a gay community center in Richmond while such centers do not exist in other areas of the state. However, there are ways to effectively do outreach no matter where you are located in Virginia. The next few slides will discuss some ways to do outreach as well as how to work with partners, once they've been identified.



# Community Outreach

- Reaching out to groups for LGBTQ individuals, allies and families to find partners involves looking for groups, places people gather formally or informally. Some ideas include:
  - LGBTQ community centers
  - Parent, Family & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) chapters
  - LGBTQ campus groups
  - Women's or Gender Studies program at local college
  - Gay & Straight Alliances in local high schools
  - Connect with supportive faith communities including the Metropolitan Community Church, Quakers, Unitarians, and Presbyterians etc.



# Community Outreach

- Outreach in rural areas can be especially difficult. Most likely individuals and groups do exist, but they may meet in different ways or more discretely as it may not be safe to be out in those communities. Some ideas for outreach in rural areas include:
  - Attend a regional event, such as the nearest pride parade. You may connect with someone from your local area while lending your support to the community.
  - Contact a statewide or regional LGBTQ group to see if they have any contacts in your community.
  - Again, reaching out to local church congregations that are LGBTQ friendly can be an invaluable resource, especially in rural areas.
  - Include LGBTQ issues in presentations in the community. Doing so can result in LGBTQ individuals or groups contacting you (in addition to educating about DV in LGBTQ relationships).
  - Some LGBTQ individuals in rural areas use the internet to make connections. Try doing some outreach on message boards, social media and list serves.
  - Update your website to include LGBTQ issues so anyone looking for services will know where to find you.



# Community Outreach

Once you've identified some partners, some ways in which you can work together include:

- Partner with LGBTQ- focused groups/ programs to do cross-training;
- Hold public awareness events;
- Develop a taskforce on intimate partner violence in the LGBTQ community;
- Recruit LGBTQ board members, volunteers, staff, committee members;
- Make a commitment to participate in LGBTQ events;
- Talk with other agencies about their commitment to inclusivity. This can show the community that you value respect for all people, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.
- One collaboration between a DV agency and a gay community center involved creating a video project called “The Survivor Stories” which can be viewed [here](#).



# Inside the building- creating a welcoming environment

Welcome means: to accept gladly, to greet upon arrival, or to receive with pleasure.

- Promoting a welcoming environment includes:
  - display LGBTQ-friendly images
  - use inclusive language
  - demonstrate respectful behavior
- These actions send the message that every person that walks through the door understands that every person is to be treated with respect without exception.
- When you enter a new environment to receive services, what makes you feel most welcome? *Take the poll [here!](#)*



# Signs of safety

- In many places LGBTQ individuals do not feel welcome, or are not sure if they are welcome, so they often look for signs that indicate safety, respect and acceptance.
- Some people call these signs “cues and clues”.

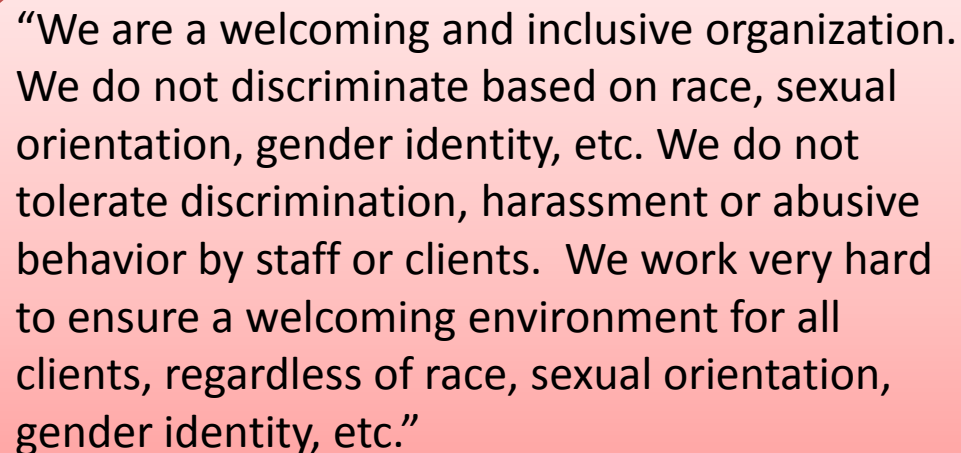


# Written materials

- Intake forms that include questions about gender identity and sexual orientation is a cue that a program is inclusive.
- LGBTQ specific brochures and handouts indicate to LGBTQ clients that the available services will address their real-life needs and communicate that their feelings, experiences, and concerns about the victimization are valid, and that someone else understands this.
- Integration of LGBTQ issues into other agency materials is another important step. For instance, a general program brochure that states domestic violence services are provided for women and children could discourage a gay male from seeking services.

# Intake/ Assessment

At intake, the nondiscrimination policy should be signed by all clients to document their willingness to treat everyone with respect. In addition to providing a copy of the non-discrimination policy, make a statement that affirms the program's commitment to services for everyone.



"We are a welcoming and inclusive organization. We do not discriminate based on race, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc. We do not tolerate discrimination, harassment or abusive behavior by staff or clients. We work very hard to ensure a welcoming environment for all clients, regardless of race, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc."

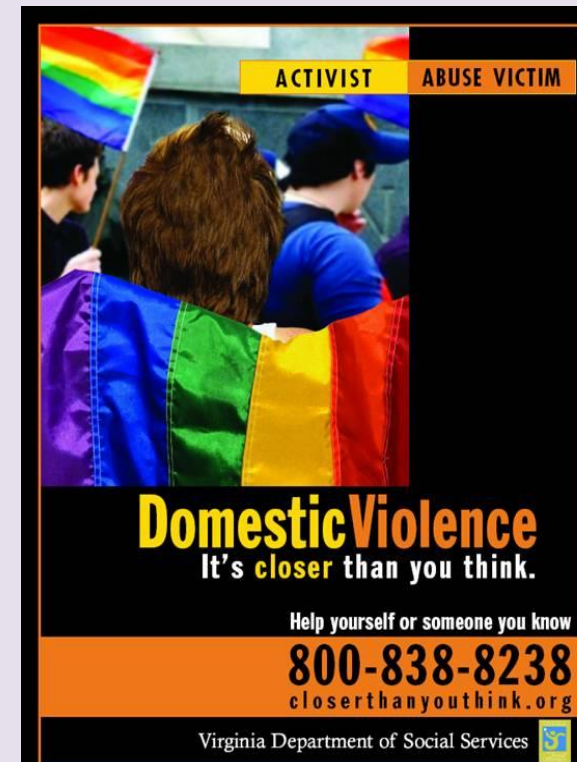
This type of statement can put an LGBTQ individual at ease. It also serves to inform all clients that discrimination and harassment are not tolerated.

# Intake/ Assessment

- Intake and assessment are particularly important in working with LGBTQ individuals to ensure they are receiving or being referred to the appropriate services.
- This is partially because there have been some instances of the abusive partner trying to access services, which can result in survivors not having access.
- Conducting an assessment to determine if the client is the abuser is ideally done before they come in to shelter.
- While there is not a definitive list of questions, nor is this step necessary for every client, there are some questions you can ask when you sense additional information is needed using the Assess Context, Intent, Effect model.
- This model asks questions to get a better sense of what has been going on in the relationship over a period of time such as: what was the purpose of the behavior? what impact did it have on each person?
- An overview on this model can be found at the Northwest Network [here](#).
- The Action Alliance will also provide a training on July 16<sup>th</sup> in Roanoke, LGBTQ 201: Taking it to the Next Level, that will explore advocacy and assessment techniques. This training is recommended for anyone who can attend. Register for the training [here](#).

# Physical cues- deck the walls

- There are a number of ways you can visually show LGBTQ clients they are welcome:
  - Posters with LGBTQ people
  - Safe zone signs
  - Rainbow stickers, buttons, flags
  - Post the non-discrimination policy in a prominent location.
- Materials can be purchased using DSS grant funds but there are also great free resources for imagery on Bing.



## Physical cues- sleeping arrangements

- Other cues for LGBTQ clients that reinforce the fact that an agency is accessible and inclusive are policies that address sleeping arrangements, bathroom and shower accommodations.
- Sleeping arrangements should not be chosen for any LGBTQ survivors, particularly transgender survivors.
- LGBTQ survivors should be offered sleeping arrangements with the gender in which they identify or according to their safety needs.
- Sleeping arrangements should not be made according to whether or not a transgender person has had a surgery as there are many reasons for not undergoing the surgery ranging from affordability to not desiring or fearing the surgery.
- Single rooms can be offered but should not be required.
- *The best approach is to simply talk with transgender clients about their preferences, safety and privacy needs while being honest about any limitations in the facility.*

## Physical cues- sleeping arrangements

- LGBTQ clients may also feel more safe and comfortable located in a room close to staff, which can reduce, or eliminate, harassment by other clients.
- A common concern that comes up regarding sleeping arrangements is how other clients will feel. What if they feel unsafe with a gay male or transgender person in the shelter?
  - This is where the non-discrimination policy can also be helpful at intake. If a client expresses it is a problem for them, you can ask them how you can help them address their fears.
  - Some programs have solved this problem by utilizing their room for people with disabilities, which can also serve as a room for LGBTQ clients as well as men.
  - An important point to remember is that if the client is not comfortable being out in the program, it's very likely the other clients will never know their gender identity or sexual orientation due to confidentiality. It's possible LGBTQ clients have already accessed services at your program without being out to staff.

## Physical cues- bathrooms and showers

- Bathrooms and showers should be accessible for transgender and gender non-conforming survivors.
- The easiest way to accomplish this is a private single stall bathroom which can be marked simply “restroom.” This setup assures transgender clients privacy, but also benefits anyone concerned about privacy.
- For gendered bathrooms with multiple stalls, clients should be able to choose the bathroom for the gender they identify with.
- It can also be helpful to place a sign on gendered bathrooms indicating the location private bathroom, if there is one.
- Some programs with only one multi-stall bathroom have solved the problem by having a schedule.



# Language

Language is one of the primary ways we communicate and plays a role in contributing to discrimination but can also play a primary role in eliminating it. Inclusive language is free from words, phrases or tones that reflect prejudiced, stereotyped or discriminatory views of individuals or groups. It is also language that doesn't deliberately or inadvertently exclude individuals or groups. Because there is no universal agreement on terminology and language, as well as culture, continually change, there are no rigid rules. An open, respectful approach is probably the most important ingredient.



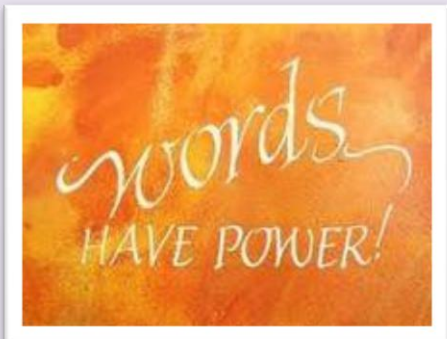
# Language

- **Some suggestions for inclusive language include:**
- **Don't make assumptions.** For instance, a woman calls the hotline and says she is being abused. The advocate says "I'm very sorry and hope I can help. Are you safe now? Do you think he is dangerous?" Such an assumption, that all relationships are heterosexual, denies the reality of same-sex relationships. This type of assumption, while seemingly harmless, can create an environment in which an LGBTQ person feels invisible and unwelcome.
- **Reflect or mirror the language client uses.** If a woman comes into shelter and calls her partner her wife, you should also refer to her partner as her wife, even when talking with the client to other staff (if she has indicated that she is ok being out with other staff).



# Language

- **Avoid stereotypes, even if they seem positive.** For instance, “gay people are more open-minded or accepting” as well as using slang terms and derogatory phrases such as “trannie” or “that’s so gay”.
- **Gender inclusive language is language that does not make assumptions and acknowledges that not all relationships are heterosexual.** Some examples of inclusive language include:
  - Partner rather than husband/ boyfriend
  - Person rather than man/ woman
  - Relationship status rather than marital status
  - They rather than he or she
  - Parent or guardian rather than mom or dad
- *Another way to be inclusive is to use examples of LGBTQ individuals and relationships when talking about abuse to clients and service providers, in addition to heterosexual relationships. Show your knowledge about LGBTQ issues and intimate partner violence.*



# Sheltering men and transgender clients

- Due to limitations in shelter facilities and often being at full capacity, some shelters have offered gay men and transgender people “hotel shelter” for short stays.
- While staying at a hotel or motel may address immediate needs, it does not offer LGBTQ victims the same level of safety and security, nor inclusion into a community of survivors with access to a greater scope of services, such as support groups, case management and housing.
- To increase access for gay men and transgender clients, it is necessary to rethink how services are provided and how to address the needs of survivors that programs have not served or underserved in the past.
- *The following case study highlights the specific challenges a gay man trying to access services may face.*

In 2008, Davis, a gay man living on the west coast, was in danger when the abuser he had fled found him. Davis received a death threat on his car from the abuser, Jason. Davis had been with Jason for seven years. During that time, Jason was always controlling. He monitored Davis' phone calls, wanted to know where he was at all times, and controlled all of their money. Jason also sexually abused Davis and, after one particularly brutal incident, Davis fled. Davis stayed with a friend that Jason did not know and got a job. He was away from Jason for a month before he found a note on his car from Jason that was essentially written as a contract on his life.

Davis strategized to get to a domestic violence shelter. With help from a local anti-violence program, Davis developed an intensive safety and advocacy plan designed to keep him moving across the country to the east coast. Along the way, Davis contacted gay-friendly churches, local and statewide domestic violence programs, and a national domestic violence organization to find shelters that would accept men, and programs that would provide food, toll money, and gas cards. The national program provided information about local shelters that would accept men, but this information was not always accurate. Davis' calls to statewide coalitions and statewide domestic violence hotlines often resulted in the message "we don't shelter men." With the help of the coalitions or by talking to supervisors, Davis could sometimes get shelter for a night or two. This process happened repeatedly during the 12 days Davis traveled to the east coast.


When Davis could not get space in domestic violence programs, he looked for homeless shelters; however, due to the very recent sexual assault, Davis did not feel safe in a homeless shelter. After much advocacy, one particular shelter agreed to make arrangements to allow Davis to sleep in one of the beds that was in the staff offices; however, when Davis arrived, the staff person that greeted him told Davis that he thought that Davis didn't look gay and looked like he could take care of himself, so he would need to stay with the rest of the men.

# Sheltering men and transgender clients

- Many shelters stay at full capacity with the female clients they serve and so serving additional clients with no additional resources may seem like an impossible task. While there is no one solution to this challenging issue, there are many resources and ideas to help programs serve all clients. A few resources include:
  - An excellent resource for working with transgender clients is [forge-forward.org/](http://forge-forward.org/) which features archived webinars and a great handout called “Considerations for Sheltering Trans Women” that can be found [here](#).
  - The Network laRed’s “Open Minds Open Doors” explores some options [here](#) (p. 88)
  - The Action Alliance owns a documentary video called “Toilet Training” that addresses the persistent discrimination, harassment, and violence that transgender people face in gender segregated bathrooms. This video is available to be checked-out.
  - The Virginia Antiviolence Project Model Policies discusses solutions on these issues for programs at [virginiaavp.org/](http://virginiaavp.org/)

# Sheltering men and transgender clients

Serving an additional population means that you are broadening the circle of survivors to give everyone the opportunity to receive the services available through your program. You can only provide the services within your capacity, but capacity is not about narrowing the circle of eligibility.



*All Survivors  
are Welcome  
Here!*

# Additional Resources

- The Northwest Network hosts an extensive online library of resources for individuals and organizations at [nwnetwork.org/resources/](http://nwnetwork.org/resources/).
- The Network laRed offers free technical assistance as well as many downloadable brochures and fact sheets at [tnlr.org/for-providers/](http://tnlr.org/for-providers/).
- The California Partnership to End Domestic Violence features many resources on LGBTQ accessibility at [cpedv.org/LGBTQ%20Project](http://cpedv.org/LGBTQ%20Project).
- VAWnet features a special collection called “Preventing and Responding to Domestic Violence in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer (LGBTQ) Communities” that is loaded with resources at [vawnet.org/special-collections/DVLGBTQ.php#402](http://vawnet.org/special-collections/DVLGBTQ.php#402).
- Equality Virginia features Virginia-specific resources at [equalityvirginia.org/](http://equalityvirginia.org/).
- The National Anti-violence Project Training and Technical Assistance Center features many resources on their website at [www.avp.org/index.php](http://www.avp.org/index.php).
- A partnership between the National Coalition of Anti-violence Projects and the Virginia Anti-violence Project, facilitated through the Action Alliance, will provide program-specific on-site technical assistance to strengthen services for LGBTQ individuals in your community. TA may include an organizational assessment, training, or assistance with policy, depending on your program’s unique needs. Contact Maria Altonen [maltonen@vsdvalliance.org](mailto:maltonen@vsdvalliance.org) or 804.377.0335 more information.

# Final Thoughts

- We are all susceptible to making assumptions about people. Through this process it may be necessary to reflect on your own attitudes and beliefs.
- We all need to unlearn myths and stereotypes and learn how to question and put aside our assumptions.
  - What stereotypes or assumptions might you need to question?
  - If you have a belief system that is opposed to same-sex relationships or traditional gender identities, are you able to put those aside to provide client-centered services?
- *Client-centered services are focused on the client's needs rather than the staff person or agency's belief system.*





*As long as I  
have any choice  
in the matter,  
I shall live only in a  
country where civil  
liberty, tolerance, and  
equality of all citizens  
before the law prevail.*

—Albert Einstein

# Thank you!!!

There is a wealth of information that already exists in Virginia, and we would like to help facilitate the sharing of some of that information. Please feel free to share any useful resources or solutions you have come across in the survey.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/2FSYGKX>

